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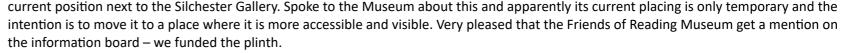
# O R Z O S Autumn 2021





### Dear Friend

Found myself in town with a bit of time before the bus left to take me home and so lovely to be able to pop into the Museum again on a whim rather than having to book in advance. Had my first look at the 'Oh Beautiful World' sculpture by Eleanor Lakelin. As you probably know this was carved out of Burr Horse Chestnut wood taken from the avenue of trees that had to be felled due to disease in 2019. They were originally planted not long before Oscar Wilde's incarceration in Reading Gaol and as such provide a direct link with him. I think it is a beautiful work though I would have liked the opportunity to be able to look at it close-up from all sides which is not possible in its



Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic we've managed to continue with a lively programme of events. As well as the online coffee mornings (where we now have decisions to make whether it is possible to continue with the online element as well as returning to physical meetings) we were also able to have our usual representation at Waterfest (which this year was combined with the celebration of 900 years since the foundation of Reading Abbey). Many thanks to Reading Borough Council for arranging this is a Covid compliant way and to the Friends of Reading Abbey for their help in loaning us their gazebo. The FoRM Council have decided that we should have our own gazebo for use at future events and as I write this I'm just awaiting its delivery. Hopefully it will arrive in time for use at the Friends of Caversham Court Gardens Summer Event where we will be present to increase awareness of Reading Museum and what our organisation does.

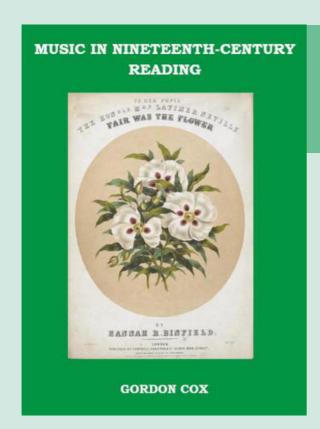
Many congratulation to Evelyn Williams and her team for successfully completing the production of a series of short videos ('Reading: ein privater Blick') about 'Friends of Reading Museum', 'Reading Museum' and 'Reading town' that will be going on display at the Düsseldorf Stadtmuseum throughout August. This has been a highly successful project and FoRM members will have the opportunity to see a selection of them at the November coffee morning. We are currently awaiting a request for funding to help with the upcoming exhibition celebrating the 50th anniversary of Reading Rock Festival – or the National Jazz and Blues Festival as it was called when it moved to Richfield Avenue in 1971. I am awaiting the detailed request from the Museum's Community Engagement Curator but we have agreed in principle. I have already made a personal donation to the exhibition in that I still have the pair of hand embroidered jeans that I wore when I travelled down from Lancashire as a naive 16-year-old to attend my first music festival. I have just unearthed a press clipping from The News of the World in which they warn of 'the way-out impact of thousands of hippies descending on a picture postcard village' – and have got a feeling that the reporter had never been to Reading!

On a closing note, Reading UK have just launched a Visitor Information initiative at Reading Station – I'm volunteering 3 hours a week and this is obviously a great opportunity to point people in the direction of Reading Museum if they are asking for things to do. In the words of their press release: 'Reading UK is looking for people who take pride in Reading, its history and culture, its diversity and its modern economy and who can spare up to three hours a week to help run a mobile visitor information stand inside Reading Station. You will have good knowledge of Reading, its geography and what it has to offer to tourists, shoppers, business visitors or people visiting for other reasons. You will be confident using maps and timetables and giving directions, have a friendly and professional manner and an ability to engage with a wide range of people'. They are looking for more people to help and if you are interested contact Alex Brannen on alex@livingreading.co.uk

Richard Stainthorp
Chair of the Friends of Reading Museum

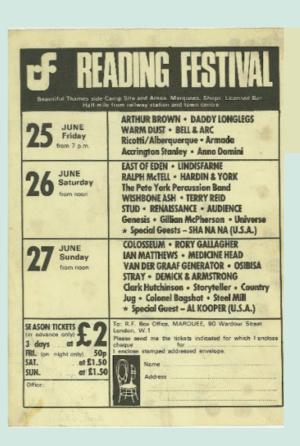
# **Events Diary**

Our monthly meetings are currently being held virtually on Zoom 10.30 am to 11.30 am



### Monday, 6 September

Dr Gordon Cox, retired musicologist from Reading University and a FoRM member, to talk about his book – Music in Nineteenth-Century Reading: A Family History, which focuses on three generations of the local Binfield family.



### Monday, 4 October

A Private View of The 1971 Reading Festival. For the First Time with Brendan Carr the Museum's Engagement Curator

### Monday, 1 November

A film show of the short videos about Reading made by FoRM that are going on display at the Düsseldorf Stadtmuseum throughout August

### Monday, 6 December

**Our Christmas Coffee Morning** 

# My Favourite Object

by Rebeca Bird-Lima



Maggi Hambling CBE is a British artist. Though principally a painter her best-known public works are the sculptures A Conversation with Oscar Wilde and A Sculpture for Mary Wollstonecraft in London, and the 4-metre-high steel Scallop on Aldeburgh beach. All three works have attracted controversy.

# "Wilde at Night"

Bronze sculpture by Maggi Hambling - 1997

Museum object number REDMG: 2009.166.1 height 24.1 cm, length 18.4 cm, depth 18.4 cm

"Wilde at Night is a beautifully dynamic sculpture created by Maggi Hambling in 1997. When I first noticed this object in Reading Museum, I was drawn to it and felt pleasantly surprised after reading its description.

Since the age of seventeen, I've had this fixation for Oscar Wilde which started when my A-Level English class was focusing on gothic literature. I read The Picture of Dorian Grey and was fascinated by the parallels between Dorian and the story of Narcissus in Greek Mythology, the aestheticism movement, and my heart went out to Basil Hallward- the tragic artist who couldn't see beyond Dorian's beauty. Before starting my Ancient History BA course at the University of Reading, I took a gap year and read most of Wilde's works when travelling around Italy and Spain.

Wilde at Night can be found in the Window Gallery and belongs to the Reading Foundation for Art Collection. Maggie Hambling has created a number of sculptures relating to Oscar Wilde; the most notable being A Conversation with Oscar Wilde, a sculpted bench which can be found just outside of Charing Cross Underground Station. Both pieces are inspired by the quote "We are all in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars", taken from Wilde's play Lady Windermere's Fan.

When you're next visiting Reading Museum, keep an eye out for Wilde at Night. It's a truly incredible object that ties in beautifully to our local heritage and is sure to leave you feeling inspired."

### Rebeca Bird-Lima

FoRM Treasurer

# FoRM Book Group

TOM FORT-

In Autumn this year the FoRM Book Group celebrates five years of enjoyable and absorbing book discussions. We have held to our commitment of choosing books with connections to our museum, linked locality and distinct cultural heritage; and to selecting books of mixed genre. In meeting this challenge we have found that from these choices we have often travelled far enriching cultural understandings. A book may be memorable for many reasons and here, five Book Group members from the inaugural meeting held in November 2016, make personal recommendations.

Chosen in January, 2020, 'The Village News' by Tom Fort (Simon and Schuster, 2017) is a chighly readable and enjoyable history of the English village. The subtitle, "The truth behind England's rural idyll", reveals that the book is also a polemic. Fort is opposed to most planning and attacks cosy myths about English villages of both the past and the present.

Fort is a local man, which is why we chose his work, and he deals with several villages near to Reading, including Twyford, where he was born, and Sonning Common, where he now lives. He makes it very clear that Sonning Common is not a perfect village (no identifiable village centre, for example) but then what is? He celebrates the normally "accidental" development of villages throughout the country, urging acceptance of the real, not a vain search for the ideal.

His approach is historical, highlighting key themes by means of specific places. For example, Bibury, Glos, gives us the "curse of the quaint" and Eversley, Hants, gives us "parson power". He deals with enclosure (East Hendred, Oxon), abandonment ((Chopwell, Tyne and Wear) and being swallowed up (Three Mile Cross, Berks), and many other rural experiences over the centuries.

Fort's method was to select villages which had been written about in the past and then to compare those records with his own present-day impressions, involving further reading and, most important, actual visits and contact with the inhabitants. Admirably, Fort spends a lot of time attending village meetings and reading the minutes. His personal interests are evident: he cycles when he can, and he always checks on sporting opportunities (cricket, football, fishing).

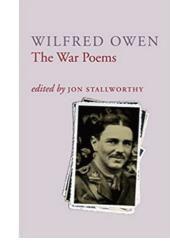
Fort is a journalist. He grabs and keeps our attention but can also occasionally seem glib and his comments in need of a little more research. His book forms a pleasant cycle-ride through contemporary rural England, with some apt criticisms. It could even be an inspiration for us to visit places we don't already know.

recommendation by Pauline Robinson

# '5 books for 5 years'

The War Poems of Wilfred Owen, edited and introduced by John Stallworthy, (Chatto & Windsor 1994), was selected as one of a number of Wilfred Owen compilations to share with the group in January 2018. Our discussion marked the centenary year of the end of WW1, and was followed by a February visit to Dunsden Green to take the 'Wilfred Owen Trail', members reading a selection of poems along the way.

Three particular poems from this collection reveal, for me, Wilfred Owen's wonderful poetic power of expressing humanity for his fellow man . All were drafted while staying at Craig Lockhart, the psychiatric hospital for officers near Edinburgh, where he recuperated from shell shock, between June and November 1917. Here he met fellow poet and mentor, Siegfried Sassoon. The powerfully tragic anti-war poems, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth ' (p. 12) and 'Dulce et Decorum Est ' (p. 29), now part of our national canon, were written a year before Wilfred Owen's death aged 25, a week before the Armistice . A lesser - known poem in the collection, 'Six O'clock in Princess Street' (p.14), written following an Edinburgh visit, reveals the poet's sympathy with those experiencing the effects of war from a distance: the war-widow; newspaper seller; those anxiously waiting for news; for the "Pale rain-flawed phantom of the place".



Wilfred Owen's life and work also have particular personal significance, as my Dunsden Green family members are mentioned in letters Wilfred Owen sent to his mother, Susan Owen, between 1911 - 1913, when assistant at All Saints Church, and living at the nearby vicarage. From experience of the local parish, and teaching at the village school, these letters reveal a concern for the children, both appreciation of their talents and recognition of hardship. Commending my own father, Lorrie Ambrose, for his artistic ability when a pupil at the school - he is described as "a 'bird starver' showing unmistakeable talent", living with his family in "a stone box with a straw lid" - his concern reveals a heartfelt humanity which later found universal expression.

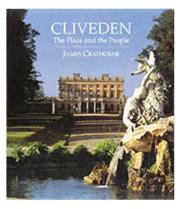
This book connects interestingly with another. Here I also recommend, 'The Collected Letters of Wilfred Owen', edited by Harold Owen and John Bell. The collection of over 670 letters was a remarkable find: the whole discovered stored away in Susan Owen's garden shed at Emmer

Green at the end of her life.

information about the Wilfred Owen Dunsden Association and Trail

recommendation by Bob Ambrose

n July 2021 the Book Group met to discuss these books about Cliveden: 'Cliveden: The Place and the People' by James Crathorne (Collins & Brown 1995) and 'The Mistresses of Cliveden: Three Centuries of Scandal, Power and Intrigue in an English Stately Home' by Natalie Livingstone (Cornerstone 2016)



James Crathorne is a member of The House of Lords. His book has a traditional approach, covering the history of the house and its owners from 1666 to its ownership by the National Trust and use as a luxury hotel today. The house was built by the Duke of Buckingham for his mistress Anna, wife of the Earl of Shrewsbury, who was killed by Buckingham in a duel. It is

best known for a 20<sup>th</sup> century scandal, the Profumo Affair which made Christine Keeler notorious and contributed to the fall of the Macmillan government.

Natalie Livingstone and her husband have a long lease on the property from the National Trust. Her book concentrates on five women who were important in the history of the house: Anna, Countess of Shrewsbury; Elizabeth Villiers, mistress of William III; Augusta, Princess of Wales, whose husband Frederick died before he came to the throne; Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland who was Mistress of the Robes and a friend to Queen Victoria; Nancy Astor, the first female MP to take her seat in the House of Commons. The author's theme is Cliveden as a setting for strong women, who were able to take part in political life although they had no official power. The house is near London, and famous for country house parties which mixed politics with pleasure. She leaves out the less interesting owners, such as Stanford University.

It was fascinating to compare these different books, both excellent histories of an English country house, and to think about the past owners when next we visit Cliveden.

### recommendation by Ann Smith

The Other Elizabeth Taylor, by Nicola Beauman (Persephone Books, 2009) was chosen for discussion in September 2018. Elizabeth Taylor, the author, was born in Reading. Admired by many writers, including Hilary Mantel and Antonia Fraser, her novels have been re-printed by Virago Press. Nicola Beauman's biography is informed by bundles of letters which escaped being burnt by Elizabeth, shortly before her death in 1975, and were later housed in the Bodleian Library. Authorised by her husband, John Taylor, to be published after his death, this biography of Elizabeth Taylor did not have the approval of her children.

Born Dorothy Betty Coles in 1912 at 71 Wantage Road, Elizabeth Taylor was the daughter of Oliver Coles, an inspector for Sun Insurance and Elsie May Fewtrell. The Dorothy was dropped and Elizabeth was known as Betty. Her maternal grandfather, Harry Fewtrell, painted crests and heraldic decorations for the Great Western Railway, and with his wife Rosa, also kept a newsagents shop at 263 Oxford Road. After WWI, they emigrated to British Columbia: one of Betty's lasting memories was of her mother Elsie crying after being parted from her parents.

The family moved to 95 Wantage Road, to be nearer the Fewtrells at 257 Oxford Road. Betty attended Leopald House school, in the Tilehurst Road before entering The Abbey School at age eleven. Here, she felt somewhat out of place. Lacking academic encouragement at home, she contrasted her life in the Oxford Road, with her school-friends. She aspired to winning the form literary prize for English Literature and her teacher, Miss Sprules, spotted her writing talent. However, despite attaining a 99% pass in her English paper, failing maths at that time meant failing the School Certificate. Thus ended her education. In the

summer of 1930, the family moved near to High Wycombe, when her father was promoted. Betty now resolved to become a writer and read avidly. She worked as a governess and also became a friend of the sculptor Eric Gill and family who lived close by at Piggot's Hill.

Elizabeth was encouraged in her writing at this time through her relationship with Donald Potter, the stone and woodcarver who arrived at Piggot's in 1931. She became librarian at Boots Book Lovers Library in High Wycombe and immersed herself in amateur dramatics, re-restyling herself Elizabeth Coles. In 1934 she met and married John

Taylor, whose family owned Taylor and Webb confectioners in High Wycombe. Just before her marriage she had joined and become an active member of the Communist Party. Personal grief following the death of her mother shortly before her marriage, led Elizabeth to resolve to become an established writer: she now settled into her own home to care for her first child, Remy, with no money worries.

Throughout the lonely war years, now at Penn, Elizabeth occupied herself with writing three novels, drawing on her life experiences; and maintained a correspondence with Labour Club friend, and furniture maker, Raymond Russell, when a prisoner of war.

A second child, was born in February 1941 and named after Eric Gill's daughter, Joanna. In 1942, together with her children, Elizabeth joined John in Scarborough, where he had been posted on war service, a visit which

influenced her first published novel, At 'Mrs. Lippincote's ' (1945), which became a literary success. Publishers now

took Elizabeth Taylor seriously. She continued to write throughout the remainder of her life, and with her reputation as a writer established, quietly realised her literary dream, although some argue that she was somewhat overlooked by sharing her name with a famous film-star. However, Elizabeth Taylor's reputation endures. Coming to her work for the first time is an unexpected pleasure: her novels are full of surprises, twists and turns. Skilfully written, her stories entice, leaving the reader full of admiration for her writing expertise. Book Group favourites, we have returned to her writing with appreciation.

recommendation by Muriel Parsons

RANCES SPALDING

Myfanwy Piper

ohn Piper

John Piper Myfanwy Piper Lives in Art, by Frances Spalding (Oxford University Press 2009) was a Book Group choice in July 2019.

This biography is unique in capturing for the first time the

lives and work of both John and Myfanwy Piper: an inspiring narrative described by the author as a journey in life and art the two made together. The book is beautifully designed and richly illustrated and although a substantial length, engages the reader throughout, as individual and shared lives unfold.

John and Myfanwy first met through a shared interest in Modernism, she, as creator of the contemporary art journal 'Axis'; he, as an abstract painter. Both became disillusioned with a pure, modernist aesthetic, and looked to an art

that would call more fully on lived experience, on memory, and sense of place. It is here that the dualbiography excels in clarity of explanation, detailing how the Pipers evolved, together with fellow artists, a distinctive new art for post WW2 Britain.

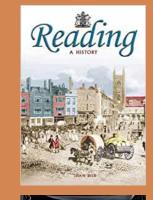
Central to this artistic development was a partnership built over decades at Fawley Bottom farmhouse, a short distance from Henley. When first discovered, the building was semi-derelict but, together and over time, the Pipers created a home that nourished art, family life and friendship. Generous hosts, their many guests included John Betjeman and Benjamin Britten, both of whom were especially important friends and collaborators. In telling the the Pipers' story, the author also tells of home-making and circles of friendship

John Piper was prolific both in writing and most art forms; and we also learn that his commitments extended to dutiful committee membership, including as advisor to the University of Reading Art Collection and as founder member of Reading Foundation for Art. Spalding explores

in fascinating detail his multi-faceted artistic production, including as official War Artist. Equally, Myfanwy's own creative life and art holds the reader's attention. From the domesticity of Fawley Bottom, in a 'room of her own', writer and art critic, Myfanwy, collaborates with Benjamin Britten,to produce libretto for a number of his operas, most notably 'The Turn of the Screw' and 'Death in Venice'': a creative collaboration that includes John Piper's theatre set designs. A particularly engaging illustration in the book is a photograph of a picnic on the steps of Venice, composer, fellow artists, and family members together for an opera launch.

Personal tragedy and challenge over time do not go neglected; but the whole dual biography tells of richly lived lives and remarkable artistic achievements made over long lifetimes. And a recounting of the development of 20th century British art, and place of the Pipers within it, invites renewed appreciation of both artists.

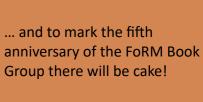
### recommendation by Audrey Gregory



# We continue with enthusiasm into Autumn 2021, our next Book Group sessions:

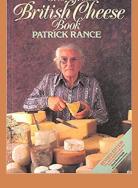
\*4th Sept: 'Reading A History' by Joan Dils. (Carnegie Publishing 2019)

\*6th Nov: 'The Corner Shop', by Babita Sharma. (John Murray Press 2020) and 'The Great British Cheese Book' by Patrick Rance (MacMillan 1982)



\*Both meetings to be held outside at the welcoming Bel & Dragon, Blake's Lock, Gas Works Road, Reading RG1 3EQ

Time to catch up, welcome new members, and celebrate reading, 'en plein air'!



BABITA SHARMA

Contact:
Audrey Gregory
Book Group Organiser
T 07887 533290

# Membership Secretary's Jottings

by Denis Pibworth

If your membership lapsed at the end of December 2020 then you should have received a membership renewal form from me. If this is not the case then please get in touch with me.

If your membership lapsed at the end of December 2019 (or earlier!) and you would like to re-join then please get in touch with me.

If you have already submitted your membership renewal to me then you should have received your new membership card, either by e-mail or conventional mail. Again, if this is not the case then please get in touch with me.

And finally, if you have paid by Standing Order, sometimes referred to as a 'Regular Payment' by the banks, and have not received your new membership card then, you've guessed it, please get in touch with me.

## My contact details

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# District Nursing in Reading

by Deborah Jenkins

# THE QUEEN VICTORIA INSTITUTE FUND

Erleigh and Alexandra Roads in Reading, an elegant stone plaque, marking the former headquarters of the local district nursing association, celebrates the QUEEN VICTORIA'S JUBILEE INSTITUTE FOR NURSES, founded 1897.

District Nursing Associations sprang up around the country to celebrate Queen Victoria's jubilee, and Reading's association was the first in Berkshire. Its foundation followed a meeting of the 'inhabitants of Reading and neighbourhood' at the Town Hall on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1897, at which the following motion was carried unanimously: "That in the opinion of this Meeting the formation of a local Institution for nursing the sick poor in their own homes would be a suitable manner of commemorating the 60 years of Her Majesty's Reign and that donations and subscriptions in aid of that object be immediately solicited".

By May 1897, enough capital had been raised, and Messrs
Sutton offered free premises for 5 years in the Forbury to
house the nurses. Powerful Reading individuals (Alderman
Hill, Dryland Haslam, Richard Benyon, Blackall Simonds,
Martin John Sutton, GW Palmer, EP Collier and John Heelas
to name but a few) and institutions (for instance The Reading
Tramway Company which provided free passes to the nurses
and Reading Football Club which allowed a collection at the

Trial Match on behalf of the Institute) offered strong support from the outset.

From 1906, the charity was based in Abbot's Walk, but the site was compulsorily purchased in 1937 by Berkshire County Council when QVI's Head Quarters were moved to Erleigh Road and the building there extended.

The services offered by QVI were instantly adopted by Reading people, and the statistics of use reveal this popularity. In 1913, 16,861 general visits were recorded, together with 5,524 visits to school children. By 1950, 93,511 general visits were recorded annually, with an additional 13,226 midwifery appointments. Inevitably, the introduction of the National Health Service altered the role and work of the charity. The 1948 annual report explains that:

'Under the National Health Service, the cost of providing the statutory district nursing benefits in Reading will be met from a grant to be received through the Local Authorities, and no charge will consequently be made to patients receiving the

service of a visiting nurse, either on a per visit basis or through the Provident Scheme. The Voluntary

Committee of the Queen Victoria Institute will continue with the day to day administration, as in the past, the local authorities having

increased representation on the

Management Committee up to one-third of
the total membership.' The agreement with
RBC was not renewed in 1955, and further
changes followed local government
reorganisations. From 1972/4, QVI started
focussing on chiropody services for older
citizens in Reading and Earley, a role it
discharges to this day.

by Deborah Jenkins

# Contact the Friends

Friends of Reading Museum c/o Reading Museum and Town Blagrave, Reading RG1 1QH

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